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# Inside Information

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## COSDA SETS FALL CONFERENCE ON EAST COAST

The Communication Officers of State Departments of Agriculture have scheduled their annual conference and workshop for September 18-20 at Boston, Mass.

According to COSDA president, Janet Christensen, the conference will overlap one day with the first day of the annual convention of NASDA (National Association of State Departments of Agriculture).

Christensen says some of the state agricultural information officers will remain to help with information support during the NASDA meeting.

This will be the first time that COSDA has held its annual meeting in conjunction with NASDA, the "bosses'" organization.

Christensen, who is information officer for the Massachusetts Department of Food & Agriculture, recently succeeded Noah Perry of West Virginia as COSDA president.

Perry was transferred from his information post to that of marketing director in the West Virginia Department of Agriculture.

Christensen was vice president of the information organization. She was elected to that post at COSDA's annual conference at Las Cruces, N. Mex., in May 1980.

Anyone interested in more details about the upcoming COSDA meeting, or about COSDA itself, should contact Janet Christensen, President, COSDA, Information Officer, Massachusetts Department of Food & Agriculture, 100 Cambridge Street, Boston, MA 02202.

Or call (617) 727-3000.

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## PREPARING FOR JUDGMENT DAY

Information division directors of several USDA agencies recently worked on a common problem--development of performance standards for mid-level information specialists in USDA.

A meeting was chaired in mid-May by Lew Brodsky, information director for the Agricultural Marketing Service, Federal Grain Inspection Service and Office of Transportation.

Brodsky was named to head a six-agency study group by USDA acting assistant secretary for governmental and public affairs Claude Gifford.

"Last year, when we began work on performance standards for information managers and specialists affected by merit pay--grades GM-13, 14 and 15--one could not help but observe the mass confusion and duplication of efforts," said Brodsky.

"We thought it might not be a bad idea to avoid the separate hassles again, and jointly develop some benchmark standards after identifying some common elements of mid-level information positions in USDA."

Beginning Oct. 1, 1981, new performance standards must exist for all federal employees as imposed by recent changes in civil service laws.

This fiscal year, only those eligible for merit pay (grades 13 and above) have needed formal standards.

"When the managerial standards were developed, every USDA agency was pretty much on its own," Brodsky noted.

He says unnecessary amounts of time and effort may have been spent by senior officials in each agency developing separate but similar standards.

Some interagency coordination might have made the task shorter and easier for all, he said.

Brodsky hopes the committee approach is providing a solution.

At the meeting, draft performance standards for GS-1081 (public information

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specialist) and GS-1082 (writer-editor) series were developed for the "3," or "acceptable" level of performance, listing elements that most USDA information jobs contain.

These will be looked at by a small group of information careerists serving in those grades, and their suggestions will be incorporated into a final set of generic standards for grades 9, 11 and 12.

In June, these sample information elements and standards will be made available to managers in all USDA information divisions.

They can be used as a common starting point when managers and employees sit down to write down job elements, but they must be expanded upon to include the three levels of performance standards and measurements required by Office of Personnel Management.

"Use of our work as a benchmark is strictly voluntary," advises Brodsky.

"The final standards set by a manager and an employee must be based on the job description and their analysis of what needs to be done, how well, and in what period of time. Of course that varies between offices and people.

"What we will circulate is very basic stuff that can be rejected, adopted, modified, or whatever, to suit the needs of the particular management situation," noted Brodsky.

Some USDA agencies already have mid-level standards completed and will probably not want to take advantage of the committee's work.

But a survey conducted during a recent meeting of USDA information directors and GPA managers showed that most agencies had not yet undertaken the task.

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\* Affairs Director, Room 407-A, U.S. De- \*  
\* partment of Agriculture, Washington, \*  
\* DC 20250, or call (202) 447-7454. \*  
\*\*\*\*\*

Members of the National Association of Government Communicators had an opportunity to hear first-hand about the new rules on publications and audiovisuals.

The national NAGC board in cooperation with NAGC's National Capital Chapter invited Edwin L. Harper, deputy director of the U.S. Office of Management & Budget to a luncheon to discuss the issue.

Although the invitation billed the event as one where Harper would answer questions, a Washington Star reporter's account indicated few questions were answered by the OMB official.

The Star story gave considerable play to the questions raised by Nelson Fitton, head of the USDA Publishing Center, and equal exposure to Harper's non-answers.

USDA communicators in Washington, D.C. area will have an opportunity to confront the OMB official on May 21.

Harper accepted an invitation to meet with the USDA group at the 4th annual public affairs workshop, sponsored by the USDA Office of Governmental & Public Affairs and the DC Region of the Agricultural Communicators in Education.

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"INSIDE INFORMATION" CIRCULARIZATION ENDS

Popularity and hopefully usefulness of "Inside Information" was verified in the recent circularization of the mailing list.

Those recipients who did not respond to the circularization notice will be dropped from the distribution list.

It will take about three to six weeks for USDA's Office of Operations & Finance to make the changes in names, addresses, and number of copies mailed.

(Editor's Note: We appreciated the response and the many kind remarks made about "Inside Information.")

Any future changes, corrections or other matters dealing with circulation of "Inside Information" should be addressed to Nancy Bevis, Room 407-A, Office of Governmental & Public Affairs, USDA, Washington, DC 20250.

Or call (202) 447-7454.

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USDA's 35th annual honor awards ceremony will be held Thursday, May 28, in the Departmental Auditorium on Constitution Avenue.  
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## COLUMNIST SUGGESTS CUTTING OUT INFO JOBS

Marianne Means, King Features Syndicate, recently in a column urged elimination of public information specialist positions from federal government.

"President Reagan seems to be having trouble finding all that fraud and waste he promised to eliminate, so I've got a suggestion for him, "Means' column started out.

"He should wipe out all the so-called information specialists in the federal government. Nobody, including journalists, would miss them," she continued.

Means said that federal agencies' "fancy information offices" can't tell her what the President's proposed cuts are.

"They can't tell me how their money is spent or why. They produce charts and pamphlets and stuff, but they can't answer the central questions about the usefulness of what they are up to," she said.

"The Department of Agriculture, for instance, has approximately 1,200 information officers around the country, with a budget of more than \$40 million.

"They do things like print booklets explaining how to can your own vegetables which Congressmen sometimes send to constituents.

"But have you ever tried to find out something substantive from those folks?" Means asked. "Try asking someone to explain what's being done to help farmers reduce energy costs."

Means says the "government's public relations setup" does not work.

"The government pays information officers to print meaningless educational material, react to crises (mostly by denying everything unflattering) and get the boss' name in print occasionally."

She suggests information officers should give out substantive information about policies and programs and how they affect people's lives.

"The basic trouble is that government information officers see so many trees they never look at the forest.

"They are immersed in paperwork, putting out notices of grants or regulations or whatever.

"They don't stop to explain just what their whole agency is all about.

"I have the impression they don't always know, themselves," Means added.

"Reagan could get rid of the whole lot of them, save some money, and take credit for trimming the fat out of government," she concludes her column.

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## MAKING THE MOST OF FOOD STAMPS IS NEWS

Some New England daily newspapers have given extensive coverage to a regional food nutrition education project.

Timmie Jensen, information officer with the New England regional office of USDA's Food & Nutrition Service, exhibits a tear sheet from the Providence (R.I.) Journal and Evening Bulletin which gave an entire page to the project.

The Boston Globe, Manchester Union Leader and other New England newspapers have given similar coverage, according to Jensen.

The project is essentially one FNS nutritionist reaching people who work with food stamp recipients (Extension Service food and nutrition aides, community workers, social service staffs, etc.) through workshops.

Using USDA's "thrifty food plan" as a guide for nutrient requirements and cost limits, nutritionist Ellen Garrahe has shown that it is possible to buy a nutritious diet on the food stamp coupon allotment.

Jensen says media reception to the project has been heartening--and credibility is the key.

"Garrahe shops locally and uses current prices and specials in her shopping list and menu plan," Jensen says.

"The thrifty food plan ceases to be an abstraction. It has worked in 22 New England communities.

"Of course, food budgeting is always of interest to the general public," Jensen adds.

In addition to newspaper coverage, a shopping trip with Garrahe was also featured "live" on the "Good Day!" show produced for the New England Network by WCVB-TV in Boston.

For further information about the project, or how news media were interested in coverage, contact Timmie Jensen, New England Region, Food & Nutrition Service, USDA, 33 North Avenue, Burlington, MA 01803.

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## FNS INFORMATION CHIEF NAMED

C. Joseph Baker has been named acting director of legislative affairs and public information in USDA's Food & Nutrition Service.

Baker has been a professional social worker for much of his career.

He worked in the Illinois Department of Public Welfare for 15 years.

Later he worked for the Iowa Department of Welfare and the state of Idaho.

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## ISNAR NEEDS WRITER FOR MANAGEMENT SEMINARS

Transfer of technology in developing countries calls for more than technology.

A host of other factors become involved from policies affecting agriculture to availability of inputs and infrastructure for transporting and marketing.

So agricultural development calls for enlightened managers and policy makers.

One technique that has worked well is the management seminar.

Patterned on the case-study method, this brings together policy makers and research managers to explore together the requirements for agricultural progress.

Dr. Don Winkelmann, director of the economics program of CIMMYT (International Center for Improvement of Maize and Wheat), has pioneered in this area.

A new round of training is in the plans, and a new library of cases will be required.

A search is on for an individual who can, with a minimum of further development, produce these study materials.

The skills are seen as--in this order of importance: (1) writing skill, (2) understanding of agriculture as a system, (3) experience in or willingness to master case study method of presenting learning materials.

The person will work for the first few months at CIMMYT headquarters, 40 km north-east of Mexico City, and is then expected to be transferred to The Hague, in The Netherlands.

The Hague is the headquarters of the International Service to National Agricultural Research (ISNAR), where the person will then work.

The writer will work under the technical direction of Dr. Winkelmann at the start.

Some time will be spent in developing countries observing the environment and people involved in problem situations.

A person who performs satisfactorily can anticipate a three-year assignment. It could be longer if the program is continued.

For more information, contact Dr. K. Robert Kern, ISNAR, P.O. Box 93375, 2509 AJ The Hague, Netherlands.

## AP Requests Info About Newsletters

The Associated Press has requested copies of and cost information about all internal newsletters issued within USDA.

## EDITORIAL PLANNING COURSE OFFERED BY GPO

"Editorial Planning for Printing Production" is a course for editors and writers presented quarterly by the Government Printing Office.

Enrollment for the June 15-18 session is now being accepted by GPO.

The course is provided to help government writers and editors, administrators associated with these fields, those who prepare specifications for use in requisitioning printing from GPO, and those who are required to work with GPO as department or agency procurement officers.

Nominations are to be made through the agency's training or personnel office by submitting a training form or a letter to the Superintendent, Typography & Design, Room C-846, U.S. Government Printing Office, 732 North Capitol Street, NW, Washington, DC 20401.

Applications are accepted until the class is filled.

Contact Mrs. Moore at (202) 275-2132 for further information.

## DESIGN SEMINAR FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

American University in Washington, D.C. will host a seminar, June 14-19 for graphic designers, photographers, writers, editors, managers and printing officers.

The 5-1/2-day seminar will be conducted by the Institute for Continuing Studies in Design, Management & Communications, in cooperation with American University's Department of Art, Graphic Design Program.

David Sutton, USDA assistant public affairs director for graphic arts, describes the seminar as "the best training around on the subject."

Fee for the seminar is \$650 per person, payable by check or agency purchase order.

They are to be made payable to the Institute for Continuing Studies in Design, Management & Communications.

Send to Mary Beth Caviness, at the Institute, 1112 Sixth Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001.

Or call (202) 289-4440 for late reservations.

## How to Get Information From USDA

The USDA information directory, "How to Get Information," will be revised in June. Last revision was in November 1980.